

# **The CHURCH The LAND AND AUSTRALIA**

MESSAGE OF HIS EXCELLENCY  
THE APOSTOLIC DELEGATE  
TO THE N.C.R.M. CONVENTION  
MARCH, 1955

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Message of His Excellency the Most Reverend Romolo Carboni, Titular Archbishop of Sidon, Apostolic Delegate to the 15th Annual Convention of the National Catholic Rural Movement at Albury, N.S.W., 22nd-24th March, 1955.

A.

From the centre of Christendom, since the beginnings of his Pontificate, the eyes of our Holy Father Pope Pius XII have ceaselessly gazed upon a world riven by international and civil wars, the outward expression of diabolic hatreds which drag men and nations to their ruin. Whole nations, which once were repositories of Christian life and culture, have been defaced and destroyed by the earthly agents of Satan who have seized upon the military and political power of the modern State as weapons with which to extirpate the spirit of Jesus Christ from the hearts of men. Even in the midst of the ruins, however, the vitality of the Christian Faith shines out with undiminished vigour. For if the testimony of blood is the characteristic witness which is demanded of so many in our age, the fidelity and constancy of so many under the hammer of persecution is a guarantee that Spirit will triumph over the brute forces of Matter and that the Faith will glow again where its light is, for the moment, dimmed.

How different is the prospect of the Catholic in our young but vigorous Australia! Where, for many others, there is a grinding poverty, his country enjoys a high level of material prosperity. Where, for others, there is despotism and tyranny, for him there is freedom. Where, for others, the Church can worship only in silence, he can render public homage to Almighty God in Churches, in processions, and in public demonstrations. Here, one might believe, the challenge to heroism is lacking and, without the challenge, not heroism but mediocrity will be found. It is therefore a source of constant joy to the paternal heart of the Holy Father to discover—even in so young a country and in a Church which, compared with the ancient Catholicism of Europe, is barely out of its swaddling clothes—the self-same Christian virtues as deeply embedded in the hearts of the faithful, but manifesting themselves in different ways.

In this particular moment, I do not speak of the personal lives of so many Australian Catholics dedicated as they are to the love of Jesus Christ and of His Blessed Mother—the indispensable basis of a truly Christian life. Here it is more appropriate for me to speak of the great constructive works of the social apostolate, founded upon that virile personal Faith, which are even now being attempted and in part, at least, achieved under the wise and inspiring leadership of your devoted Hierarchy.

From the very history of Australian Catholicism, there have come vast opportunities for apostolic action which must surely be the envy of Catholics of other lands. There the zealous desire to build the structures of their nations according to a Christian pattern and to realise in ever-increasing measure that social justice, so constantly enjoined by many Popes, seems to be implacably restrained by the dead hand of past traditions. Among Australian Catholics, however, we notice a twofold difference. Firstly, from the beginnings of Australian history, the Catholic people have played a notable role in shaping the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of their native land. Secondly, in performing this invaluable civic function, they have not failed to associate themselves with the struggle for Christian social justice and with the aspirations of the masses for economic and political emancipation. Is it too much to see in these expressions of Catholic life, the characteristic marks of Australian Catholicism?

Two anniversaries which were celebrated on the third day of December of the past year seem to symbolise much of the reality of Australian Catholicism. On that day Australian Catholics celebrated, with accustomed devotion, the feast of the great St. Francis Xavier, the Apostle of the Indies, and your own powerful patron and intercessor. On that same day, there was celebrated the centenary of the stand of the Ballarat miners at the Eureka Stockade, of those miners who, under leadership which included a high proportion of men of deep Catholic Faith, and with the deep and practical sympathy of Bishop Goold and his priests, withstood the impositions of arbitrary and despotic power. This alliance between Catholicism and the cause of social justice was furthered in the years immediately to follow when the Land Reform League, led by men of the same beliefs, became the focal point of a great movement to throw open unused lands to thousands of small farmers. In the later years of the last century, history records the names of many Catholics who were among the earliest founders of the trade union movement, a movement whose right to exist has always been defended by the Holy See. Finally, in the troublous days prior to the beginning of the present century, when the developing Australian economy was riven by great maritime disputes, Cardinal Moran did not hesitate to take his stand publicly for the cause of justice.

With such a heritage, therefore, it is easy to comprehend the great flowering of Catholic life and action which has been the characteristic of the present generation of Australian Catholics. It is in that history that one discovers the origins of the Social Justice Statements, those annual declarations of the Australian Hierarchy which with pure and precise definition apply the more general principles of the Social Encyclicals to the most pressing problems of the Australian nation, leaving no one in any doubt as to

the right courses to be followed in the field of social reform. It is this history which has made possible that magnificent effort of so many Catholic workers, acting in association with their brethren outside the Faith, to deny to the enemies of God the control of the trade union movement by means of which these enemies sought to subvert the whole social order. It is the vitality which stems from such a history which has led you to respond to the challenge to your charity presented by the presence in your midst of so many young students from neighbouring Asian lands, young men and women upon whom so much will depend when the final battle is fought between the forces of good and evil for the soul of Asia.

Beyond the realm of personal sanctity and love of God—without which nothing that is good can be built—it has been the characteristic of Australian Catholicism that it has sought to impregnate the material structures of society with the spiritual force of the Christian Faith. In thus acting, you have carried out an indispensable apostolate. In fostering and encouraging these developments your Bishops have correctly understood the meaning of the words of the present Holy Father when he declared that a "superficial piety is not enough." (1) On that occasion he added:

"Under the pretext of defending the Church against the risk of being embroiled in the sphere of the 'temporal' a word of command, given many decades ago, continues to find acceptance in the world: let us go back to the purely 'spiritual'. By that, people understood that the Church was to confine herself rigidly to the field of strictly dogmatic teaching, the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, the administration of the Sacraments, and was forbidden all right of entering or even of observing the field of public life, or of intervening in the civil or social order.

"... As if dogma had not a place in every field of human life! As if the Mysteries of Faith, with their supernatural riches, must no longer strengthen and give meaning to the lives of individuals, and, by the logical sequence, enable public life to move in harmony with the law of God, and impregnate it with the spirit of Christ! Such an amputation is utterly anti-Catholic.

"The word of command must be quite the opposite! For the Faith must be 'present' wherever vital interests are at stake; where there is any discussion of the laws which concern the worship of God, marriage, the family, the school, the social order."

(1) Pius XII. Discourse to 400 Women Members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, 1947.

## B.

It is with all of these things in mind that I turn my attention on this occasion of the Fifteenth National Convention of the Catholic Rural Movement to the indispensable role of that organisation in the national and international life of the Church. Your motto—

"To restore Christ to the country . . . . ."

To restore the country to Christ"

leaves me in no doubt that you have clearly understood that even in the field of the rural apostolate, the end of all your effort is spiritual, the salvation of souls, whether the methods of your apostolate are directly or indirectly adapted to that end.

You do well, then, as members of the Rural Movement, to stress the obvious truth, which is no less true because it has been forgotten by so many nations, that agriculture is the first and primary industry, the basis of all sound life in any community. "Agriculture is the first and most important of all arts; so also is it the first and true riches of States," declared Pius VII in 1802. Nor did your own Hierarchy exaggerate the truth when, in 1943, it stated:

"We hold the firm conviction that the stability and prosperity of rural life is of prime importance to the future of Australia, that unless the welfare of rural life is made the first aim of Australian social policy, the free institutions of this country, both in political and social life, will be destroyed by the inroads of totalitarianism."<sup>(3)</sup>

It is not by chance that the Church has everywhere, in every age, defended the agricultural way of life, particularly in moments like the present when the great quantitative achievements of industrialism and technology blind even Catholics to the human and spiritual consequences of these forces. It is certain that religion itself thrives best where the institution of the family is strong. It is for this reason that Pope Pius XII has already stated "the establishment in full strength and vigour of the institution of the family (to be) the central task of the Catholic man."<sup>(4)</sup>

Who can deny that this institution flourishes best in a situation in which agriculture is accepted as the foundation of society, and in which the needs of agriculture and industry are fully balanced, with the emphasis constantly placed upon the former? It is not by chance that the agricultural populations are more fertile than the

inhabitants of the great urbanised metropoli—for on the land the family is the basic co-operative unit. In the great city, on the other hand, almost every factor—economic, social, cultural—tends to pound the family to pieces depriving even infants of that exclusive care from their mother to which they are, by nature, entitled—depriving parents of the financial co-operation of their children at the moment when the latter become earners of income, depriving the old of secure shelter and care in their declining years.

No Catholic, then, can be neutral where the fate of agriculture and rural life is concerned. The Holy Father has already stated that the moral recovery of the whole people depends on the steadfast faith and moral integrity of the tillers of the soil."<sup>(5)</sup> Applying these traditional Catholic attitudes to the circumstances of Australia, your own Hierarchy has spoken with great emphasis on this subject-matter in saying: "The task of the Rural Movement is vast in extent and overwhelming in importance. The success of the Rural Movement is the condition of the success of all Catholic Action."

In face of this clear-sighted declaration, who can oppose himself to your work, who can even be neutral?

If this intimate connection between the Church and the agricultural way of life is universal, its practical importance is greatest in those countries, like your own, where it can be said that economic development has barely begun and where great natural resources bestowed by the Creator still remain to be turned to the uses of men. Your Bishops have already expounded the historic opportunity which lies before you. In their official pronouncement, "Catholic Action in Australia," which was directed to ensuring unity of organisation and of policy in the lay apostolate, they set forth the real issue in words which must be well known to you:

"It is true that the problems of an expanding industrialism and a decaying agriculture, such as face the Church in other lands, already exist in the settled areas of Australia and particularly in the great metropolitan cities. In this sphere, the methods which have proved so fruitful in Europe must also be employed in Australia.

"But Australia, on the other hand, is a young land. Here the die has not yet been cast. It will be cast, however, in the lifetime of the present generation. There will be a flood of population rolling over this country. If it is not European it will be Asiatic. But the tide will flow. All our institutions will be thrown into the melting pot by the energies which this tide will release. The problem which today faces the Catholics of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys is typical of the

(3) "Pattern for Peace", 1953 Social Justice Statement of the Hierarchy of Australia (Page 9).

(4) Pius XII, Address to Italian Catholic Action (Sept. 7th, 1947) on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the men's section of Catholic Action.

(5) Pius XII, Address to Italian Confederation of Farmers (March 1952).

problem which will face the Catholics of every region of the Commonwealth. Today a beginning has been made on the work of diverting the Snowy River into the Murray or the Murrumbidgee. Great hydro-electric schemes, great irrigation projects will follow in the wake of this diversion. There will be vast industrial development in the Valleys. There will be a great agricultural development. But will this development be on the lines of big industry and big agriculture, or small industry and small agriculture? For the Catholics of the Valleys, this is the real question of the hour. Should the former alternative be realised, the result will be slums, insecurity, class warfare and the threat of Communism. Should the latter alternative be chosen, there will be established the social framework of personal freedom, family life and social peace.

"Shall the Catholic community wait until the vital decisions are taken by others whose attitude to these questions is often materialistic in inspiration, and then work within the framework of un-Christian social institutions to influence individuals? Or shall it **make** the institutions? Shall it make history?

"This historic conjunction of people, land, water and power will give birth, wherever it is effected, to a new civilisation. And what is true of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys is true also of the Hunter Valley, the Clarence Valley, the Burdekin Valley, the coal-bearing regions of central Queensland and other areas in other States. New civilisations are there in the melting pot. The question of the hour is whether the social institutions of these great new regions will be made by paganism or by Christianity."<sup>(6)</sup>

For the Catholic fully conscious of the mission and destiny of the Church, there is but one answer. Under God, let us go forward. Under God, let us make history.

How clearly then have your Bishops understood, in this as in other matters, the real meaning of the words of the Holy Father uttered on many occasions! They have recalled, in relation to their own country, the problem to which he adverted when he questioned the advisability of industrialising communities, the economies of which were previously only partly developed. Of these policies he asked: "Do they or do they not contribute to the reintegration and the assurance of healthy productivity in the national economy? Or do they merely increase still more the number of industries always subject to a new crisis?"<sup>(7)</sup>

(6) "Catholic Action in Australia." Statement of the Australian Bishops associated with the National Organisation of Catholic Action, 1949 (pp. 38 and 39).

(7) Pius XII. Discourse to the International Congress of Social Studies and the International Christian Social Union (1950).

The answer to problems such as this lies in the realm of public policy, and there the Church, if it is to realise the fullness of its mission, must surely play its part. Let no one maintain that religious and apostolic action must abstain from these fields, must limit itself to the increase of personal fervour and piety, however necessary these ends may be. The present Pontiff has already spoken clearly on this matter, saying: "A super-naturalism which withdraws itself from economic and political needs and duties as if they did not concern the Christian and Catholic is something unhealthy, something alien to the thinking of the Church."<sup>(8)</sup>

The exercise of the social apostolate in the field of public policy is always a matter of delicacy to be guided by the dictates of prudence. Nevertheless a false concept of prudence must never be made the excuse for simple inaction. As His Holiness pointed out in his letter to the President of the *Semaines Sociales de France* in August 1947 it is "wishful and illusive thinking to believe—as certain persons do—that anti-clericalism and anti-Catholic sentiments can be disowned by restricting the principles of Catholicism to the field of private life . . . Catholics will maintain and will improve their positions according to the measure of courage they show in demonstrating their deep personal convictions in public and private life."<sup>(9)</sup>

Finally, the social apostolate, and in particular the economic, industrial and political fields, are, in a special manner, the responsibility of laymen. Acting as faithful sons of the Church, under the guidance of the Pope and of their Bishops, laymen are called upon to assume the true responsibilities of initiative and leadership in the social, economic, industrial and political fields. Effective action in such fields demands a competence in technical matters with which the priest, by virtue of his office, is not necessarily endowed. Here the Church relies greatly upon the laity. Here the Church should or could be served and represented either entirely or mainly by the laity.

It is in the field of public policy also that so much can be done by the Catholic Rural Movement of Australia to assist in the solution of one of the most pressing international problems of our time. I refer to the pressure of great populations upon scant material resources in some countries while in others, peoples, small in numbers, are unable to develop the resources which a bountiful Creator has supplied for the needs of many.

That the Australian people as a whole, and Australian Catholics in particular, have recognised their responsibilities in this regard, has always been a special joy to the Holy See. A warning note for the future was struck, however, by the economic recession of 1952-

(8) Pius XII. Address to the members of the "Pax Christi" Movement (1952).

(9) Pius XII. Letter to Prof. Charles Flory, President of the *Semaines Sociales de France* (1947).

53, which greatly reduced the number of migrants accepted by Australia. This was a great setback to the cause of international co-operation and charity, and it inevitably raised the question: is it enough to proclaim a policy in favour of migration, without at the same time complementing it with detailed and specific policies which provide for the absorption of the migrants, for homes and for economic opportunities for them?

The answer was again given by your Bishops in their Statement, "Land Without People," in which they went to the heart of the matter by coining the phrase "wed migration to land settlement." They focussed attention to a matter very close to the heart of the Holy Father when they declared:

"We therefore extend the most cordial approval to every enterprise which enables migrants, together with Australian returned soldiers and civilians, to own land of their own. We view with particular interest proposals for large-scale 'colonisation', which have been outlined by public leaders, seeing in these proposals the best opportunity for the organised absorption of migrants relatively quickly and in sufficient numbers."<sup>(10)</sup>

The achievement of such a noble objective demands, of course, some organised body which will make itself responsible, as it were, for the promotion of the idea. As it has pioneered this statesmanlike approach to a great international question, let the Catholic Rural Movement proceed with confidence in its endeavour to bring it to a successful conclusion. May it enjoy the well-deserved support of statesmen of Australia and of European countries, without whose co-operation this great end can hardly be achieved. To them the Father of Christendom would no doubt address the self-same words as he addressed to the statesmen of Europe when dealing with the critical question of European unity: "Why continue to hesitate? The end is clear; the needs of nations are obvious to all. If anyone asks in advance for an absolute guarantee of success, the answer is that there is a risk, but a necessary one; a risk, but in keeping with present possibilities, a reasonable risk. One must proceed certainly with caution, advance with well-calculated steps; but why distrust at this point the high degree of skill attained by political science and practice? They are sufficiently capable of foreseeing the obstacles and preparing the remedies."<sup>(11)</sup>

(10) "Land without People," 1953 Social Justice Statement of the Hierarchy of Australia (Page 13).

(11) Pius XII. Christmas Broadcast (1953).

### C.

These, then, are the thoughts on which I would wish the members of the Catholic Rural Movement—and indeed all associated with the work of the Lay Apostolate in general and of Catholic Action in particular—to ponder as they embark on their annual Convention. The opportunities before the Church in Australia are immense, so long as they are approached in a spirit of prayer, of dedication and of unity. Today, as always, a strict, cordial and effective unity of all Catholics is extremely important, moreover essential, for the very security of their Church as well as of their Nation.

To guarantee this unity, the Hierarchy of Australia has created its Episcopal Committees and set up its national organisations of Catholic Action and of the Lay Apostolate, with which the Rural Movement is joined. As in the not too distant past the Holy Father urged the members of Catholic Action in a European country, so do I urge all those engaging in Catholic Action and in the Lay Apostolate in Australia to "strengthen your internal unity, always accentuating the unitary character of your organisation . . . . There is no orderly disposition of forces, if, once differences and capacities have been taken into account, there is not also assured unity of command."<sup>(12)</sup> On the one hand, the perils encompassing the Church and the Nation are so great, on the other, the opportunities to be availed of by faithful and disciplined children and citizens so vast that, whatever juridic forms the situation may dictate, nothing less will suffice than moral unity of all Catholic organisations under the leadership of the Holy See and the Hierarchy.

(12) Pius XII. Address to Italian Catholic Action, 8th Dec., 1953.

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